

Hospice Fraud and Abuse

Why look at hospice services?

- Beneficiaries do not understand Medicare and Medicaid eligibility requirements.
- Beneficiaries do not know what services are provided.

Why you may not want to report hospice fraud:

- You may fear a loss of services or even retaliation from the agency, prescribing physician or in-home staff.
- As a hospice patient, you have the right to change hospice providers only once during each period of care. You fear that you may lose necessary services if you make waves.

What is the meaning of “terminally ill?”

The patient has an irreversible disease with a terminal prognosis. Medicare defines “terminally ill” as having 6 months or less to live. All beneficiaries are allotted a specific amount of lifetime credits for Hospice Care.

Who is eligible for Medicare hospice benefits?

- You are eligible for Medicare hospice benefits when you are covered by Medicare Part A (Hospital Insurance) and your doctor and the hospice medical director certify that you are terminally ill and probably have less than 6 months to live.
- You must sign a statement choosing hospice care instead of routine Medicare covered benefits for your terminal illness.
- You must receive care from a Medicare-approved hospice program.

What hospice services does Medicare cover?

- Doctors,
- Nursing care,
- Durable medical equipment (DME), such as wheelchairs or walkers,
- Medical supplies, such as bandages and catheters,
- Drugs for palliative care (symptom control and pain relief),
- Short-term care in the hospital, including respite care,
- Home health aide and homemaker services,
- Physical, occupational and speech therapy (PT, OT and ST),
- Social worker services,
- Dietary counseling,
- Counseling to help you and your family with grief and loss, and
- A portion of the cost for outpatient drugs and inpatient respite care.

What services are not covered?

- **Medicare will not pay for treatment to cure your terminal illness.** As a hospice patient, you can get palliative or comfort care to help you cope with your illness, not cure it. Hospice uses medicine, equipment, and supplies to make you as comfortable and pain-free as possible. As a hospice patient, you always have the right to stop getting hospice care and go back to your regular doctor or health plan.

- Room and board is not covered by Medicare if you get hospice care in your home, or if you live in a nursing home. In certain cases, depending on the level of services provided, the costs for room and board are included in Medicare's payment (**for example**, when a hospice patient is admitted to a hospital or skilled nursing facility for the inpatient or respite level of care).

How long can I get hospice care?

- You can get hospice care as long as your doctor certifies that you are terminally ill and probably have less than 6 months to live. If you live longer than 6 months, you can still get hospice care if your doctor re-certifies that you are terminally ill.
- Hospice care is given in periods of care. You can get hospice care for two 90-day periods followed by an unlimited number of 60-day periods. **At the start of each period of care, your doctor must certify that you are terminally ill in order for you to continue getting hospice care.**
- A period of care starts the day you begin to get hospice care. It ends when your 90- or 60-day period is up. If your doctor re-certifies that you are terminally ill, your care continues through another period of care.

Fraud schemes:

- The hospice agency files duplicate claims, and receives payment from both Medicare and Medicaid.
- The hospice agency gets the spouse's Medicare number during a visit. All Medicare beneficiaries are allotted a specific amount of **lifetime** credits for Hospice Care. The spouse may find out later, when they need hospice time for themselves, that Medicare has already been billed under their Medicare number and they have no allotted time left of their own.

It is in your best interest and that of all citizens to report suspected fraud. Health care fraud, whether against Medicare,

Medicaid or private insurers, increases everyone's health care costs, much the same as shoplifting increases the costs of the food we eat and the clothes we wear. If we are to maintain and sustain our current health care system, we must work together to reduce costs.

To Report Suspected Medicare Fraud
Call Toll-free 1-800-726-2916
Or Write to Address Below